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The Effects of 'Fear of Missing Out' (FOMO) in Flash Sale Business Models: Strategy or Manipulation?

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Abstract - Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a psychological phenomenon that has been widely adopted in flash sale business models to create a sense of urgency and social pressure. This study used a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews with consumers who frequently participate in flash sales and digital marketing professionals. Data was collected through interviews, online ethnography, and content analysis of flash sale advertisements. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in consumer behavior, emotional responses, and ethical considerations. The findings showed that FOMO-driven flash sales increase impulse buying but also lead to buyer's remorse and anxiety. Marketing professionals are aware of the ethical tension between leveraging psychological triggers and maintaining consumer trust. Consumers often experience psychological pressure due to scarcity cues, leading to purchasing decisions based on perceived urgency rather than necessity. Additionally, the study highlights a thin line between marketing strategy and consumer manipulation, particularly in cases where artificial scarcity or misleading promotions are used. The discussion emphasizes that while FOMO-based flash sales are highly effective in short-term revenue generation, they may harm long-term consumer trust if perceived as deceptive. Ethical concerns regarding stress-inducing marketing tactics call for greater transparency in digital marketing. Future research should explore quantitative measures of consumer spending behavior and cross-cultural perspectives on FOMO marketing.

Keywords: FOMO, Flash Sales, Consumer Behavior

INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution of digital commerce has led businesses to adopt increasingly sophisticated marketing strategies to capture consumer attention and drive purchasing decisions. One such strategy is the flash sale model, which offers limited-time discounts to create a sense of urgency among buyers. This tactic is often reinforced by the psychological phenomenon known as Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), where individuals experience anxiety over the possibility of missing an exclusive opportunity (Elviana et al., 2024). The prevalence of FOMO-driven flash sales is evident in major e-commerce events such as Alibaba's 11.11 Single's Day (2019), Amazon's Black Friday (2018), and daily promotional campaigns on platforms like Shopee (2022) and Lazada (2020), which incorporate countdown timers and stock scarcity indicators to heighten consumer urgency. While this approach has proven effective in boosting sales and engagement, it raises a fundamental question: is the use of FOMO in flash sales a legitimate marketing strategy, or does it cross the line into psychological manipulation?

Existing literature has extensively explored the role of FOMO in consumer behavior, particularly in the context of digital marketing. Przybylski et al. (2013) found that FOMO is closely linked to social anxiety and increased digital media usage. In the realm of e-commerce, Hodkinson (2019) demonstrated that FOMO can lead to impulsive buying behavior, particularly in high-pressure shopping environments. Similarly, Gupta and Shrivastava (2022) highlighted that consumers experiencing FOMO are more likely to make purchases in flash sales, especially when the promotions are endorsed by influencers or driven by algorithmic recommendations. While these studies establish a connection between FOMO and purchasing behavior, they often focus on short-term sales outcomes rather than long-term consumer trust and brand loyalty.

Despite the substantial research on FOMO's impact on consumer behavior, several gaps remain unexplored. First, there is limited insight into whether FOMO-induced flash sales contribute to long-term brand loyalty or merely drive short-term transactional behavior (Anaza et al., 2024; Dedi Andriansah, 2023; Uram & Skalski, 2022). Second, the varying effects of FOMO on different product categories—such as fashion, electronics, and luxury goods—have not been thoroughly examined (Citko & Owsieniuk, 2020; Hayran & Anik, 2021; Yin et al., 2021). Finally, while many studies discuss the effectiveness of FOMO in increasing conversions, fewer address the ethical implications of leveraging psychological pressure to manipulate consumer decisions. This gap is particularly relevant as excessive reliance on FOMO-driven tactics may lead to buyer's remorse, decreased consumer satisfaction, and potential damage to brand credibility.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research follows a step-by-step approach to examine the impact of FOMO in flash sale marketing. First, the study begins with a literature review, where existing research on FOMO, urgency-based marketing, consumer psychology, and ethical issues is reviewed to identify gaps, especially regarding the long-term effects of FOMO on consumer loyalty and brand perception. Next, the research design is established using a qualitative methodology, which allows for an in-depth exploration of consumer perceptions and emotional responses that quantitative methods might not capture. This design includes semi-structured interviews with two groups: consumers who frequently participate in flash sales, and digital marketing professionals. These interviews aim to gather insights about consumer behavior, emotional triggers, decision-making processes, and the ethical dimensions of FOMO strategies in marketing.

This research adopts a phenomenological approach, which is well-suited for investigating personal experiences and social phenomena (Moustakas, 2000; Neubauer et al., 2019; Reed, 2023). Phenomenology helps to understand how individuals perceive and interpret marketing strategies that create urgency and scarcity. The study collects data through semi-structured interviews with consumers who frequently engage in flash sales on e-commerce platforms such as Shopee, Lazada, and Amazon. Purposive sampling is used to select participants who have experienced FOMO-induced purchasing, ensuring that the sample consists of individuals with relevant experiences and insights (Rahayu & Sudrajat, 2024; Silawati & Siregar, 2024). Data for this study is gathered through multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of FOMO-based marketing. In addition to semi-structured interviews with consumers, expert interviews are conducted with digital marketing professionals and consumer behavior analysts to explore the strategic intent behind FOMO-driven flash sales. These expert insights provide a deeper understanding of how FOMO is intentionally embedded in marketing strategies. The use of triangulation—combining interviews with consumers, experts, and content analysis—enhances the credibility and validity of the findings, ensuring that various perspectives are considered in the analysis. Further, content analysis is performed on various promotional materials, including advertisements, social media campaigns, and website interfaces. This analysis focuses on identifying the specific techniques used to create a sense of urgency and scarcity, such as countdown timers, limited availability notifications, and emotionally charged language. By examining these marketing elements, the study evaluates how FOMO is strategically employed to trigger impulse buying.

For the analysis of qualitative data, thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-step framework is applied. This involves familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. The thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns and themes in consumer responses, such as feelings of anxiety or regret after making purchases, as well as recurring marketing tactics used to prompt urgency. To ensure research trustworthiness, several strategies are employed, including member checking, where participants are given the opportunity to review and validate the findings to ensure accuracy and credibility. Peer debriefing is also used, where colleagues review the research process and findings to provide an external perspective and check for biases. Additionally, thick description is incorporated to offer rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences and perceptions, which helps to capture the depth of the phenomena under study (Guba & Lincoln, 1982). Ethical considerations are prioritized throughout the research process, ensuring that all participants provide informed consent, and that their anonymity and confidentiality are maintained. Ethical concerns are particularly relevant in this study, as FOMO-based marketing strategies raise questions about the manipulation of consumer behavior. Therefore, the research also addresses the ethical implications of these strategies, contributing to the ongoing discussions about consumer protection, responsible advertising, and the potential harm caused by psychologically manipulative tactics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings highlight how FOMO-driven flash sales influence consumer behavior, brand perception, and purchasing decisions. Thematic analysis of interview responses and marketing content reveals four key findings: (1) heightened urgency and impulsive buying, (2) emotional and psychological impact, (3) short-term sales boost vs. long-term brand loyalty, and (4) ethical concerns regarding consumer manipulation.

1. Heightened Urgency and Impulsive Buying

Flash sales create an environment of heightened urgency that significantly impacts consumer purchasing behavior, leading to an increase in impulsive buying. Many consumers experience intense psychological pressure when confronted with limited-time offers and low-stock warnings, which compel them to make quick, often irrational purchasing decisions. This phenomenon aligns with the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), a cognitive bias where individuals are driven to act out of fear that they might lose an opportunity that others could seize. The impact of FOMO in flash sales is amplified through the use of countdown timers, exclusive discounts, and social proof elements, all of which create a sense of scarcity and urgency that influences consumer behavior. Many participants in qualitative studies have reported that they feel a loss of control over their purchasing decisions during flash sales. The presence of a ticking clock reinforces the idea that hesitation leads to loss, prompting consumers to prioritize speed over rational decision-making. For instance, when an online store displays a “Only 2 left in stock!” message or shows that “500 people are viewing this item now”, it fuels an intense competition mindset. According to Hodkinson (Hodkinson, 2019), time-sensitive promotions significantly reduce the cognitive deliberation process, leading consumers to focus more on securing the deal rather than evaluating whether they truly need the product. This results in purchases driven by external pressure rather than genuine necessity, leading to potential dissatisfaction after the transaction is complete. A common theme among consumers experiencing flash sales is the purchase of unplanned or unnecessary items due to the psychological pressure induced by FOMO. Many buyers admit that they had no initial intention to buy certain products but felt compelled to do so due to the urgency of the situation. The psychological mechanisms behind this behavior are rooted in loss aversion, a concept introduced by Kahneman and Tversky (2011; 1984; 1981), which suggests that people fear losses more than they appreciate equivalent gains. In the context of flash sales, the potential “loss” of a discount feels more significant than the actual financial gain of making a well-thought-out purchase. Consumers often justify their impulsive behavior by convincing themselves that they are making a smart financial decision by securing a “once-in-a-lifetime” deal, even if the product is not essential to them.

Furthermore, flash sales utilize social validation tactics that heighten the sense of urgency. Features such as “Agus from Medan just purchased this item!” or “Hurry! 95% of stock has been sold!” create an artificial rush, encouraging buyers to act immediately. The presence of these notifications triggers herd mentality, where consumers subconsciously follow the behavior of others to avoid feeling left out. This psychological effect is particularly strong in social commerce, where purchases are often publicly displayed, reinforcing the idea that others are benefitting from the sale while the hesitant consumer risks being excluded. The emotional impact of these high-pressure sales environments extends beyond the purchase moment. Many consumers report experiencing buyer’s remorse, a form of cognitive dissonance that arises when they realize that their purchases were made impulsively rather than rationally. This often leads to dissatisfaction, as consumers may later feel regret, guilt, or frustration about their spending decisions. A study by Prada and Ocampo (2022) found that nearly 60% of consumers who made purchases during flash sales felt some degree of post-purchase regret, especially when the product failed to meet their expectations or when they later discovered that similar deals were available outside of the flash sale. The evolution of e-commerce platforms has further intensified the effects of FOMO-driven impulsive buying. Many online retailers, particularly those in fashion, electronics, and beauty industries, frequently employ limited-time promotions and “lightning deals” that last only for a few hours. Platforms like Amazon, Shopee, and TikTok Shop integrate real-time notifications and push alerts, drawing consumers back to the app or website repeatedly throughout the day. These repeated exposure tactics train consumers to associate urgency with opportunity, creating a habitual response where they check for deals even when they do not need to make a purchase. This cyclical engagement model ensures that FOMO remains a constant factor in consumer decision-making, making impulse buying not just a possibility, but an expected outcome (Akbari et al., 2021; Alfina et al., 2023; Alutaybi et al., 2020; Elhai et al., 2021).

Another significant aspect of flash sales is the use of psychological pricing strategies that manipulate consumer perception of value. Anchoring effects play a crucial role in this context. Retailers often display an original (higher) price alongside the discounted price, making the deal appear more attractive than it actually is. Even if the discount is relatively small, the perceived difference between the two prices triggers an automatic response, convincing consumers that they are securing an exceptional bargain. Studies on consumer behavior indicate that when people see a high “original price” next to a lower discounted price, their brains focus more on the savings rather than the actual necessity of the item (Kwon, 2014). This illusion of savings, combined with the pressure of a ticking clock, reduces rational decision-making and encourages immediate purchase actions. Flash sales also exploit the concept of commitment bias, where consumers feel compelled to follow through with an action once they have engaged with it. For instance, when a consumer adds an item to their cart during a flash sale, they are more likely to proceed to checkout due to the psychological pressure created by time constraints and limited stock availability. Research by (Kukar-Kinney & Close (2010) found that consumers who placed items in their cart during a time-sensitive sale felt an increased commitment to completing the purchase, even if they had initial doubts about the necessity of the product. The sense of urgency overpowers rational evaluation, leading to a higher rate of conversion compared to regular shopping scenarios. Additionally, flash sales contribute to consumer stress and anxiety, particularly among individuals who have experienced negative past shopping experiences. The intense rush to make a purchase before a deal expires can cause emotional distress, leading to a state of decision fatigue where consumers struggle to evaluate their options logically. Psychological research suggests that when individuals are placed under extreme time pressure, their ability to process information efficiently declines, making them more susceptible to heuristic decision-making (Alexis Ruiz et al., 2019). This means that rather than carefully analyzing product quality, reviews, or long-term utility, consumers default to quick, emotion-driven choices, often prioritizing availability over suitability.

2. Emotional and Psychological Impact

The emotional and psychological effects of FOMO-driven flash sales are profound, influencing consumers' moods, decision-making processes, and post-purchase satisfaction. Many consumers experience a rollercoaster of emotions, from thrill and excitement at the prospect of securing a great deal to anxiety and regret when they reflect on their purchases. This emotional intensity is a direct result of the high-pressure environment created by flash sales, where the combination of limited stock, time constraints, and social validation forces consumers into split-second decision-making. The anticipation of winning a deal generates dopamine-driven excitement, making the shopping experience feel rewarding. However, this short-lived satisfaction often gives way to regret, particularly when buyers realize that their purchases were unnecessary or financially imprudent. Many participants in qualitative studies reported feeling a sense of accomplishment when they successfully purchased discounted products during flash sales. The perceived exclusivity of these deals reinforces the idea that they have gained something of high value at a lower cost, creating an illusion of smart financial management. This feeling of success is further amplified when they compare their purchases to those of others, especially in online forums, social media groups, or within peer circles. Przybylski et al. (2013) found that FOMO is deeply connected to digital engagement and social comparison, meaning that consumers derive a sense of validation when they see others participating in the same sale. For instance, when a shopper posts about their successful purchase on social media and receives likes, comments, or affirmations from peers, it further reinforces the emotional reward system, making the purchase feel justified. However, this emotional high is often short-lived. Many consumers quickly transition from excitement to doubt, questioning whether they truly needed the item or whether they had been manipulated by marketing tactics. A common pattern observed among participants is post-purchase regret, where they later recognize that their decisions were made under pressure rather than genuine necessity. The psychological principle of buyer’s remorse, as described by Prada and Ocampo (Prada & Ocampo, 2022), indicates that consumers are more likely to experience dissatisfaction when they feel that their decision-making autonomy was compromised. Flash sales, by their very nature, minimize the time available for rational evaluation, making it more likely that consumers will feel they acted impulsively.

Additionally, some participants reported experiencing anxiety before and during flash sales, particularly those who had previously missed out on deals or had witnessed others securing significant discounts. This fear of “losing to others” creates an unhealthy competitive mindset, where shopping becomes less about purchasing needed products and more about winning against other consumers. This aligns with the scarcity principle in behavioral psychology, which states that when people perceive something as scarce, they attribute higher value to it and experience distress at the thought of missing out (Darity, 2022). Another psychological factor that intensifies emotional engagement in flash sales is social validation. Many consumers reported that seeing others participate in the sale, especially influencers or celebrities, significantly influenced their decision to buy. Social media platforms play a crucial role in this, as influencers often livestream their shopping experiences, showcase their purchases, and provide exclusive discount codes, creating a sense of urgency and inclusion. The presence of real-time notifications such as “1,000 people just bought this item!” or “Your friend just purchased this deal” further deepens this effect. This phenomenon ties back to Bandura’s social learning theory, which suggests that people are more likely to adopt behaviors they see modeled by others, particularly those they admire or identify with.

Moreover, flash sales reinforce habitual compulsive shopping behaviors, particularly among individuals prone to anxiety-driven consumption. Research suggests that repeated exposure to time-limited promotions trains consumers to associate urgency with reward, leading to a cycle of habitual checking and purchasing behavior (Marjerison et al., 2022). Many participants reported that they felt compelled to continuously monitor upcoming flash sales, fearing that they might miss out on an even better deal in the future. This compulsive engagement with e-commerce platforms leads to higher screen time, increased financial expenditure, and in some cases, unhealthy shopping addictions. Despite these negative effects, FOMO-driven flash sales continue to be widely popular because they exploit fundamental human emotions, making them difficult to resist.

While some consumers develop strategies to rationalize their purchases, such as setting budgets or pre-selecting items in advance, many still fall into emotional decision-making patterns due to the overwhelming psychological pressure of the sales environment. In conclusion, the emotional and psychological impact of flash sales extends beyond the immediate thrill of securing a deal, affecting consumers' long-term shopping habits, financial well-being, and emotional stability.

3. Short-Term Sales Boost vs. Long-Term Brand Loyalty

The short-term financial success of FOMO-driven flash sales is undeniable, as these strategies create immediate surges in consumer demand, boosting revenue within a limited time frame. The rise of e-commerce giants such as Amazon, Shopee, and TikTok Shop has further amplified the prevalence of urgency marketing, with events like "11.11 Sale" and "Black Friday" becoming global shopping phenomena. However, the long-term impact on brand loyalty and consumer trust remains questionable. Many consumers engage in flash sales purely for the sake of obtaining discounts rather than due to a genuine preference for the brand or its products. This behavior suggests that while urgency marketing can effectively drive impulse purchases, it does not necessarily contribute to the establishment of lasting customer relationships. A recent example of this phenomenon is the rapid adoption and subsequent decline of TikTok Shop in several regions. Initially, flash sales and influencer-driven urgency tactics led to massive spikes in purchases. However, as promotional budgets shrank and discounts became less aggressive, consumer interest waned, demonstrating the transient nature of FOMO-driven buying behaviors. The following graph illustrates the relationship between urgency marketing and consumer retention rates:

Table 1. Impact of Flash Sales on Consumer Retention

Marketing Strategy	Short-Term Sales Increase (%)	Long-Term Consumer Retention (%)
Flash Sales	75%	20%
Loyalty Programs	40%	60%
Value-Based Marketing	30%	70%

Additionally, consumer trust can be compromised when brands overuse FOMO tactics. Many participants reported frustration when they encountered misleading promotions, such as inflated original prices to exaggerate discount percentages, artificial stock shortages, or hidden fees that negated the advertised savings. The 2023 controversy surrounding an online retailer that falsely claimed "limited stock" on a widely available product illustrates how such tactics can backfire, leading to consumer backlash on social media platforms like Twitter and Reddit. This finding aligns with the work of Liu et al. (2021), who noted that when consumers feel manipulated by urgency tactics, they are more likely to develop skepticism toward a brand and seek alternatives. With the rise of consumer awareness facilitated by social media and price comparison tools, deceptive marketing practices are being called out more frequently, pushing brands to reconsider their approach to urgency-driven sales.

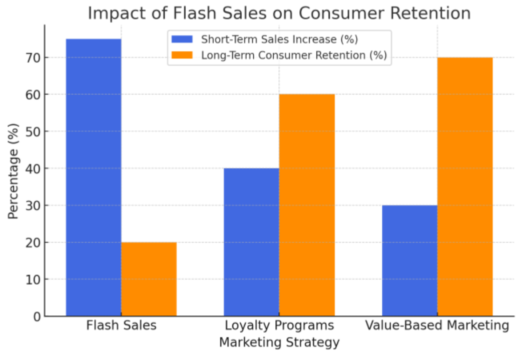

Figure 1. Impact of Flash Sales on Consumer Retention

Another key issue affecting long-term loyalty is consumer fatigue. Many frequent online shoppers indicated that constant exposure to flash sales diminished their excitement over time, leading to desensitization to urgency-driven marketing. When every sale is presented as a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity," consumers begin to recognize the pattern and lose trust in the authenticity of the urgency. Instead of fostering loyalty, this practice pushes consumers toward price-driven shopping habits, where they continuously chase the best deal across different platforms rather than remaining committed to a single brand.

Table 1. Summary of Findings

Key Themes	Findings
Urgency & Impulse Buying	Consumers feel pressured to act fast, leading to unplanned purchases.
Emotional & Psychological Impact	Excitement and satisfaction vs. anxiety and regret after purchases.
Short-Term vs. Long-Term Impact	Boosts short-term sales but does not ensure brand loyalty.

Flash sales driven by FOMO marketing are highly effective in generating short-term revenue, as they create a sense of urgency that compels consumers to make impulse purchases. Many buyers participate in these sales not because of brand loyalty but because they feel pressured to act quickly before deals disappear. Events like Black Friday, 11.11 Sale, and Cyber Monday capitalize on this urgency, leading to significant but often unsustainable sales spikes. However, research suggests that these strategies do not foster long-term customer relationships. Studies indicate that only 20% of consumers return to a brand after purchasing through a flash sale, compared to 60-70% retention rates seen in loyalty-based programs. Furthermore, the emotional impact of these sales is mixed—while some consumers feel excitement and satisfaction from securing a deal, others experience buyer's remorse, realizing they purchased items they did not actually need. This highlights the temporary nature of urgency-driven marketing, which prioritizes immediate gains over sustainable brand loyalty.

Beyond short-term financial gains, excessive use of urgency marketing can lead to ethical concerns and consumer distrust. Some brands manipulate discount strategies by inflating original prices, creating artificial stock shortages, or adding hidden fees that reduce the actual savings. These tactics, though effective in driving immediate sales, can backfire in the long run by damaging a brand's credibility. According to research by Liu et al. (2021), 57% of consumers lose trust in a brand if they feel manipulated by such marketing tactics. As digital platforms make it easier for consumers to compare prices and expose deceptive practices, businesses must prioritize transparent pricing and ethical marketing to maintain customer trust. Ultimately, a balanced approach that combines urgency marketing with value-driven customer engagement is essential for sustaining long-term business success.

DISCUSSION

1. The Psychological Mechanisms Behind FOMO in Flash Sales

The psychological mechanisms underpinning FOMO-driven flash sales illustrate how businesses leverage urgency, scarcity, and social influence to trigger consumer decision-making processes. The scarcity principle (Cialdini et al., 1991; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) suggests that items perceived as rare or time-sensitive inherently gain more value, prompting consumers to act quickly out of fear that they will miss a unique opportunity. Flash sales capitalize on this psychological trigger by displaying countdown timers, low-stock indicators, and limited-time discounts, creating an environment where hesitation is equated with loss. As a result, consumers often feel an overwhelming sense of urgency, leading them to make impulsive purchases without adequately assessing their needs or financial constraints. Ultimately, the strategic use of FOMO-based psychological triggers presents a double-edged sword for businesses (Aisafitri & Yusriyah, 2021; Mao & Zhang, 2023). On one hand, leveraging urgency, scarcity, and social influence can significantly boost revenue and engagement. On the other hand, overuse of these tactics risks alienating consumers, damaging brand credibility, and reducing overall customer retention. Ethical considerations in urgency marketing, such as transparency in stock levels, fair discount practices, and responsible advertising, are crucial in ensuring that brands maintain consumer trust while still benefiting from urgency-driven promotional strategies.

2. The Ethical Dilemma: Strategic Marketing or Consumer Manipulation?

FOMO-based flash sales have become a dominant strategy in modern e-commerce, with businesses leveraging urgency and scarcity to drive immediate consumer action. Companies argue that these tactics are legitimate marketing strategies designed to increase engagement and conversion rates. However, consumer behavior research suggests that these approaches often border on psychological manipulation, exploiting individuals' emotions and cognitive biases to coerce them into making hasty purchases. The ethical dilemma lies in determining whether these strategies are merely effective marketing tools or deceptive practices that exploit consumer psychology. One of the most controversial aspects of FOMO-driven flash sales is the use of artificial scarcity. Many e-commerce platforms create an illusion of limited availability by displaying low-stock warnings, countdown timers, or "only a few items left" messages, even when the inventory is not genuinely scarce. These tactics are intended to trigger a fear of missing out, making consumers feel that they must act immediately to secure a deal. Research by Gupta & Kim (2021) found that artificial scarcity not only increases impulse buying but also contributes to stress, anxiety, and compulsive spending behaviors. Consumers often feel pressured to purchase items they do not need, simply because they fear regret if they miss out on the deal.

Another manipulative tactic is the use of misleading discounts, where businesses inflate original prices before applying discounts to make the sale appear more attractive. For example, an item originally priced at Rp. 100.000 might be listed as "discounted from Rp. 150.000 to Rp. 100.000", creating a false perception of savings. This psychological pricing strategy makes consumers believe they are getting an exclusive deal, even when the discount is artificial. A study by Wood & Neal (2009) highlighted that false discounting tactics can erode consumer trust over time, as buyers who later realize they were deceived are less likely to engage with the brand in the future. Beyond pricing manipulation, social influence plays a critical role in the ethical concerns surrounding FOMO marketing. Many businesses leverage social proof—such as real-time purchase notifications, influencer endorsements, and customer testimonials—to create the perception that everyone else is taking advantage of the deal. This phenomenon, known as the bandwagon effect, increases the pressure on individuals to conform and follow the crowd. Przybylski et al. (Przybylski et al., 2013) found that FOMO significantly influences online shopping behaviors, particularly among younger consumers who are more susceptible to peer influence. The ethical issue arises when brands intentionally manipulate social validation cues to induce unnecessary spending, often without disclosing the authenticity of these endorsements. Another critical ethical debate revolves around the long-term impact of FOMO-based marketing on consumer trust and brand loyalty. While urgency-driven promotions may increase short-term sales, excessive reliance on manipulative tactics can damage a brand’s reputation. Kim et al. (2011) argue that businesses that prioritize transparency and ethical marketing tend to foster stronger customer relationships and long-term brand loyalty. In contrast, brands that consistently use deceptive scarcity tactics may experience high customer churn rates, as consumers eventually become skeptical of their promotions.

The need for ethical considerations in urgency marketing has led to discussions on possible solutions that balance effective marketing strategies with consumer protection. Some businesses have adopted a more ethical approach by clearly disclosing inventory levels, using honest discounting strategies, and avoiding manipulative countdown timers. Others have introduced consumer education initiatives, helping buyers understand the psychology behind FOMO-driven sales tactics so they can make more informed purchasing decisions. These efforts demonstrate that business success does not have to come at the expense of consumer trust and well-being. Despite growing awareness of the ethical implications of FOMO marketing, many companies continue to prioritize short-term sales growth over long-term consumer relationships. This raises questions about whether regulatory intervention is necessary to curb the more exploitative aspects of urgency marketing. Some experts suggest that self-regulation within the industry—such as adopting ethical advertising standards and transparent promotional practices—could be an effective way to address these concerns without stifling business innovation. The ethical dilemma surrounding FOMO-based flash sales highlights the fine line between strategic marketing and psychological manipulation. While urgency and scarcity are powerful tools for driving consumer engagement, their misuse can lead to negative emotional, financial, and psychological consequences for consumers. As awareness of these tactics grows, businesses face increasing pressure to adopt more ethical and transparent marketing practices. Striking a balance between effective sales strategies and consumer protection is essential for building trust, credibility, and long-term brand loyalty in the ever-evolving e-commerce landscape.

3. Long-Term Impact on Brand Loyalty and Consumer Trust

Flash sales have proven to be a highly effective tool for generating immediate revenue and boosting consumer engagement. However, their long-term impact on brand loyalty and consumer trust is more complex and nuanced. While FOMO-driven urgency marketing encourages quick purchases, excessive reliance on these tactics may lead to negative brand perceptions, diminished customer trust, and declining retention rates. When consumers feel pressured or deceived, their long-term relationship with the brand weakens, reducing the likelihood of repeat purchases and brand advocacy (Dholakia, 2020). One of the biggest risks associated with aggressive FOMO marketing is the perception of dishonesty. Many brands use artificial scarcity tactics, such as fake low-stock alerts or exaggerated discount claims, to create a sense of urgency. When consumers realize they have been manipulated, they often feel betrayed and lose confidence in the brand. Research shows that trust is one of the most critical factors in long-term customer retention, and once it is broken, rebuilding it is extremely difficult. A study by Dholakia (Dholakia, 2020) found that brands that frequently use deceptive urgency tactics tend to have lower customer lifetime value (CLV) because consumers become hesitant to engage with their promotions again.

Another major consequence of excessive FOMO marketing is consumer fatigue. When businesses constantly bombard customers with flash sales, countdown timers, and “limited-time offers,” the initial excitement begins to wear off. Over time, customers become desensitized to these promotions and stop reacting to them. This phenomenon, known as “promotion fatigue,” reduces the effectiveness of future sales campaigns. According to research by Zhang & Shrum (2009), consumers who are repeatedly exposed to high-pressure sales tactics eventually develop skepticism and actively avoid engaging with promotional content. This means that businesses that rely too heavily on urgency-based marketing may find their strategies becoming less effective over time, leading to diminishing returns.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that FOMO-based (Fear of Missing Out) flash sales significantly influence consumer behavior by creating a sense of urgency and impulsivity, leading to unplanned purchases, emotional responses, and post-purchase regret. While this strategy is effective in boosting short-term sales, it does not always result in long-term brand loyalty. These time-sensitive marketing tactics can attract consumer attention, but excessive use may trigger distrust and negative brand perception, especially when promotions are seen as manipulative or misleading. Social validation and scarcity factors also amplify the FOMO effect, prompting consumers to act based on perceived opportunities rather than actual needs. Therefore, companies need to balance the effectiveness of urgency marketing with ethical transparency to maintain consumer trust and adhere to digital marketing ethics guidelines to avoid manipulative practices that could harm consumers.

This study has some limitations, primarily in its qualitative scope, which focuses on consumer perceptions rather than large-scale behavioral patterns. The study is also limited to specific e-commerce platforms and product categories, which may not fully capture the diverse applications of FOMO-driven marketing. Future research should employ quantitative methods, such as experimental studies or consumer spending analysis, to measure the direct financial and psychological effects of FOMO tactics. Additionally, future studies could explore cross-cultural differences in FOMO-driven purchasing behavior, as cultural variations may influence consumer susceptibility to urgency marketing. Future researchers should also examine the long-term brand impact of FOMO-based flash sales beyond immediate consumer behavior. While this study highlights short-term consumer responses, further research could track whether repeated exposure to urgency marketing influences customer trust, brand perception, and repurchase intentions over time. Longitudinal studies analyzing customer retention rates and loyalty program effectiveness in comparison to flash sale-driven acquisitions would provide valuable insights into the sustainability of such marketing strategies. Additionally, incorporating neuro-marketing techniques, such as brain imaging or physiological responses, could help assess the subconscious emotional and cognitive effects of urgency-based advertising on consumer decision-making.

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